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# CALVIN COOLIDGE



A MAN WITH VISION—  
BUT NOT A VISIONARY

From  
Coolidge's Public Speeches

THE people cannot look to legislation generally for success. Industry, thrift, character, are not conferred by act or resolve.

EACH man is entitled to his rights and the rewards of his service, be they never so large or never so small.

THE measure of success is not merchandise, but character.

THE man who builds a factory, builds a temple; the man who works there, worships there; and to each is due, not scorn and blame, but reverence and praise.

EXPECT to be called a standpatter, but don't be a standpatter. Expect to be called a demagogue, but don't be a demagogue. Don't hesitate to be as revolutionary as science. Don't hesitate to be as reactionary as the multiplication table.

WE NEED more of the Office Desk and less of the Show Window in politics.

THERE is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, any time.

*From Woman's Home Companion, March, 1920.*

# The Silent Man on Beacon Hill

## *An Appreciation of Calvin Coolidge*

By BRUCE BARTON

WE LIKE novelties, we Americans; especially do we like them in our public life—and nowhere else are we offered so pathetically few of them. Year after year the same familiar types crop up in politics to go through the same threadbare campaign gymnastics. The same stuffed-shirt oratory; the same “pointing with pride” and “viewing with alarm;” the same old exaggeration and distortion—no wonder political meetings are unattended and political news gets tucked back into the center of the paper. We have heard it all before; we know it is merely part of a game played by rule, with all too little of sincerity or conviction; we suffer it in silence, and sigh with relief when it is through. Only at rare intervals does something fresh and new and different break across the dull horizon; and when that unexpected does occur we draw a deep breath, and thank God and take courage.

Roosevelt was such a blessed phenomenon; Wilson, when he emerged from the sheltered confines of the university to run for governor afforded us a new sensation—a college professor running for governor; it was worth watching, worth reading about. And now, to stir our jaded interest, another new thing under the sun has appeared—a politician who apparently conforms to

none of the established rules; who operates after his own peculiar fashion, and yet somehow succeeds in getting his fellow citizens to vote for him in numbers that have made all political observers stop, look, and listen.

Whether Calvin Coolidge has any chance for the Presidency I do not know; this story is not written about Coolidge the Presidential possibility. It is written about Coolidge the human being, the silent, half mysterious individual who sits there on Beacon Hill, running the State of Massachusetts and causing even old-time political reporters who visit him to feel a little thrill of wonder and of questioning.

I have said that he is something new under the sun; in another sense everything about him is reminiscent. He seems somehow vaguely to recall another long-passed period in our national life; the period when Jefferson rode to his inauguration astride a white horse; when Lincoln ran the White House as the unconventional headquarters of a real democracy; when it was quite the thing to have a moving faith in representative government; and when we were accustomed to say in public speeches that America had been chosen by Almighty God for a special mission in the world demanding a more than ordinary degree of devotion and self-sacrifice. The day when Government governed, and the individual still had the habit of looking to himself for his success and economic salvation, not to Congress or the President.

Coolidge is a Yankee; he has spent his whole life amid the traditions of the forefathers, and is himself a kind of an embodiment of those traditions, a kind of contemporary forefather.

There are three places where one may go to find out about Calvin Coolidge. To Plymouth, Vermont, twelve miles from a railroad, where he was born and brought up; to Northampton, Massachusetts, where he held about every office that his

neighbors could elect him to—and where Mrs. Coolidge and the two boys still live in half of a little frame house not nearly as pretentious as the house Lincoln occupied when he was earning three thousand dollars a year by the practice of law in Springfield—and to Boston, where he camps in two rooms in the Adams House, and walks to and from his job morning and night like any other workingman.

There is a popular misconception about his ancestry. It is asumed that he is connected with a family of the same name which occupies a position of considerable wealth and social influence in Boston. I had that notion in the beginning. Later I learned that his grandfather was a farmer in Vermont, his father, John Calvin Coolidge, a farmer and country merchant who enjoys the title of colonel by reason of service on the staff of a governor of Vermont, while Calvin himself reached Massachusetts by way of Amherst College and the class of 1895.

He was a raw country boy, his pants tucked into his boot tops, and the marks of rural Vermont plain upon him. To the majority of the college he remained unknown throughout the four years; and with the exception of certain scholastic honors attained no prominence. Only a very few of the more thoughtful men saw in him anything unusual.

To those few there was the same peculiar fascination that has both lured and baffled men in his later career. He made no effort whatever to be popular; often hardly a word would pass his lips for days at a time, except such as were absolutely necessary to keep him supplied with food and to report his presence in the classroom. So much silence, such concentrated silence, might well savor of a pose; but Coolidge comes by it naturally enough. His grandfather was a notorious hoarder of words, and his father, whose common sense and straight thinking have made his neigh-

bors turn to him as a sort of unofficial magistrate in matters of neighborhood policy or dispute, manages life with a mere fraction of the ordinary allotment of conversation. If silence were really golden, the income tax of the Coolidge family would be something immense./

After graduation Calvin Coolidge moved across the river and settled four miles from Amherst, in Northampton. "Never could see much advantage in roaming around," he explained. There for two years he studied law in the office of Hammond and Field. After he had been in the office about three months Mr. Field noticed an item in the Springfield "Republican" to this effect:

"John Calvin Coolidge, a student at law in the office of Hammond and Field, Northampton, has been awarded the hundred-and-fifty-dollar gold medal offered to the member of the Senior Class of any American college for the best essay on a historical subject.

Mr. Field showed the item to Coolidge and asked him if he had received the medal. He said he had. Mr. Field asked him where it was, and he produced it from his desk.

"How long have you had it?" Field demanded.

"About six weeks."

"Why didn't you tell us you had received it."

"I don't know."

"Have you told your father?"

"No," said Coolidge. "Would you?"

He passed the medal over to Field, asking that it be kept in the safe, and for a good many years he never showed it to anybody. In the same noiseless fashion he conducted his domestic and professional affairs in Northampton, establishing a modest home, and living always very quietly, but with an unusual degree of serious attention to his job. Presently his fellow townsmen elected him to the city council; then city solicitor; then mayor; then senator. So in time he became presi-



dent of the Senate; lieutenant governor, and finally governor.

Thus his whole active life has been spent in public service; and few men can bring to high position a more consistent or varied experience in administrative affairs. Viewed as a whole, his career seems a perfectly logical development, one election following naturally and almost inevitably upon the preceding one. Yet each fresh honor has been a kind of mystery to the political wise-aces of the State, and—one is tempted to think—even to himself. He had no intention of remaining in public life, and he has consistently neglected all of the little precautions which are considered elementary by professionals in the game.

For example, he has never joined any lodge. It is an axiom of politics that the public man should be a "joiner." The opportunities for acquaintance and support which the lodges provide are too obvious to be disregarded, and nearly every public man will be found on the membership rolls of a number of them. Coolidge is not even a member of the Grange. He respects the lodge, and understands fully its service and appeal, but he is not naturally gregarious; he has been busy at the job all his life, and he has too much downright sincerity to seek membership merely for what it might mean to him in the way of support.

Similarly, he has apparently made no effort to cultivate friendships, even when they were certain to prove influential. The man who has been his chief supporter in Massachusetts was deeply offended by him in their first encounter. That man, a prominent merchant in Boston, was a member of the Board of Trustees of Amherst College. The trustees desired the legislature to pass a law allowing the college to connect its sewer system with the sewer system of the town, and he, with his attorney, went to talk with Coolidge about it.

They laid the matter before him, and when they

had finished Coolidge said nothing. He made neither promise nor suggestion. He was himself an Amherst man; he was the senator from the Amherst district, charged with responsibility in such matters; yet they left his office utterly at sea as to his attitude toward their appeal. Later, it appeared that the session of the legislature was so far along that nothing could be done then. Coolidge understood this, and probably assumed that they understood it, too. At the next session he attended to the matter promptly. But the chance to put those two men under obligation to him, to impress them with his efficiency and good will, to line them up as possible supporters for the future—all this he totally disregarded. They left his office feeling as though they had been rebuffed—because they did not understand the man.

There are dozens of anecdotes to the same effect. One cannot hear them without marveling. It takes an immense amount of faith in the trustworthiness of the voters, in their ability to recognize faithful work and reward it, for any public official to conduct his career as Coolidge has done. He has stuck to his various jobs, doing them without self-advertisement, with an old-fashioned thoroughness dictated by an old-fashioned conscience, willing to let the record speak for itself, and equally willing, apparently, to step down at any time when the voters should find the record insufficient.

That sort of quiet, undeviating work and study develop a self-reliance and a degree of solid knowledge of the job that are bound sooner or later to make themselves felt. Coolidge's opportunity to show what the years had given him came, of course, with the police strike in Boston. His whole action there was characteristic. He showed no nervous eagerness to leap into the limelight. It was the duty of the mayor of Boston, under the law, to handle the situation so long as the forces at his command were

adequate. Only when the thing was distinctly up to him did Coolidge act, and there was no hesitation then.

The attorney general of the State and one of the leading constitutional lawyers had been working together for a day or more to examine the law and determine exactly what the governor might and ought to do. They met with him at luncheon to present the results of their research, but before they could lay their plan before him, he startled them with a question:

"Would it not be possible for me, under such and such statutes, and such and such decisions, to take this course of action?" he asked. And thereupon outlined to them exactly the plan which they had devised, quoting the very authorities they had gathered. In his own quiet way he had made sure of the law, and was ready for the emergency.

What happened in Boston during the strike, and thereafter, everyone knows. The voters of Massachusetts registered their verdict upon the incident by giving him a majority of over one hundred and twenty-five thousand votes in the elections following—a greater majority than had been rolled up by any governor of Massachusetts for many years.

I said at the beginning of this article that there are certain old-fashioned characteristics of Coolidge that are exceedingly refreshing in these ultra-modern days. Most obvious among them is the simplicity of his living. He has managed to stay in public life for twenty years only by living a 1920 life on the basis of 1820's expenditures. His house in Northampton is unpretentious. He has always been well dressed, and so are his two boys, John and Calvin. But beyond this his living is conducted on the plane of the most ordinary private citizen.

As lieutenant governor he lived in a room at the Adams House in Boston that cost him one

dollar a day. After his election as governor his friends waited upon him with a suggestion.

"You ought to take a furnished house on Beacon Hill," they said, "where you can entertain influential men, and live like a governor."

He listened without comment, but the only change he has made in his mode of living is to take one more room at the Adams House. He now has two instead of one; and his ten-thousand-dollar salary is doubtless enough to keep him and his family and leave a margin over.

In all his previous offices he had time to carry on some private practice, but it never amounted to more than a very few thousand dollars a year.

There are two ways to be independent in life: One is to make money enough to cover all your wants; the other is to limit your wants so strictly that you don't need much money to cover them. Coolidge has adopted the second expedient. Money, apparently, is no larger factor in his thoughts than it was in Lincoln's. But, unlike Lincoln—who never could understand figures and took no interest in the financial department of the Government—Coolidge has a keen Yankee appreciation of finance. He is never worried about money, as Lincoln was for so many years. He is solvent always; he pays his bills punctually on the first of the month, buys himself a couple of boxes of stogies, and is relieved of all money cares for another thirty days. No day laborer in the commonwealth works longer hours, or with more consistent application to the job than he. And few are so poor that they do not live fully as lavishly as their governor.

The second thing that heartens one in these days of social panaceas is his whole-hearted recognition of economic fundamentals. It has for years been the fashion of politicians to ride into office by abusing wealth and promising a millennium of comfort to labor through legislation.

Against that sort of demogogy Coolidge has stood like a rock.

"The people cannot look to legislation generally for success," he said in his speech on assuming the presidency of the Senate. "Industry, thrift, character, are not conferred by act or resolve. Government cannot relieve from toil. It can provide no substitute for the rewards of service. It can, of course, care for the defective, and recognize distinguished merit. The normal must take care for themselves. Self-government means self-support.

"Man is born into the universe with a personality that is his own. He has a right that is founded upon the constitution of the universe, to have property that is his own. Ultimately, property rights and personal rights are the same thing. The one cannot be preserved if the other be violated. Each man is entitled to his rights and the rewards of his service, be they never so large or never so small."

And again, in his speech to the Amherst alumni:

"As a result of criticizing these conditions (the distribution of wealth) there has grown up a too-well-developed public opinion along two lines; one, that the men engaged in great affairs are selfish and greedy and not to be trusted, that business activity is not moral and the whole system is to be condemned, and the other, that work is a curse to man, and that working hours ought to be as short as possible, or in some way abolished. \* \* \*

"I agree that the measure of success is not merchandise, but character. But I do criticize those sentiments, held in all too respectable quarters, that our economic system is fundamentally wrong, that commerce is only selfishness, and that our citizens, holding the hope of all that America means, are living in industrial slavery.

\* \* \* The man who builds a factory builds a temple; the man who works there worships

there, and to each is due, not scorn and blame, but reverence and praise."

If anyone has uttered sounder doctrine for these troubled days, in more effective language than that, I have not seen the utterance.

The clarity of his thought and the beauty of the expression is another element of attraction in Coolidge. There are passages in his speeches that rise to the best heights of American eloquence, and few men have the power of condensing a big thought into more trenchant language. Take these bits as typical:

"Do the day's work," he said to the Senate. "If it be to protect the rights of the weak, whoever objects, do it. If it be to help a powerful corporation better to serve the people, whatever the opposition, do that. Expect to be called a standpatter, but don't be a standpatter. Expect to be called a demagogue, but don't be a demagogue. Don't hesitate to be as revolutionary as science. Don't hesitate to be as reactionary as the multiplication table."

Or again:

"When you substitute patronage for patriotism, administration breaks down. We need more of the Office Desk and less of the Show Window in politics. Let men in office substitute the midnight oil for the limelight."

Or this, at the time of the police strike:

"There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, any time."

In days like these, when it seems as if so many public men were reading nothing beyond the newspapers, when every problem seems to come to them wholly new, as though nothing of the sort had ever occurred in human history before, it is heartening indeed to find a man who has read much of history, who brings some mental background to the discussion of the day's work, and who can carry on that discussion in lan-

guage that lifts rather than lowers the average of the day's news.

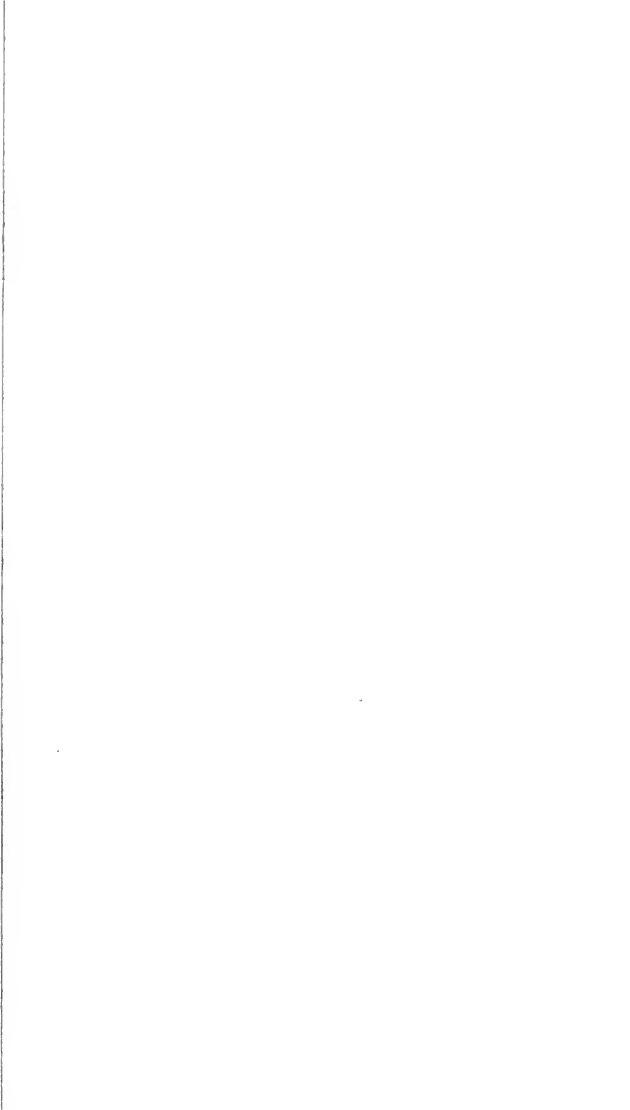
Finally, one cannot fail to be impressed with Coolidge's steadfast faith in the soundness of our institutions. And by an even larger faith, also—a vision of the spiritual foundations that underlie all political and economic problems. It is their failure to discover any spiritual element in our economic life that is so disappointing in most of the utterances of capitalists and labor leaders alike. Too many labor leaders talk as if, by adding another dollar to the day's wage and cutting another hour off the day's work, we might straightaway bring in the millennium. Those of us who have seen that process carried to its final fruitage in the lives of the idle rich know that there is no one more miserable than the man who has had many dollars added to his day's income and all the hours of work abolished.

Man does not live by bread alone. He is a spirit, not a physical machine. And no man is fit for large leadership in America who fails to recognize that great truth.

"Statutes must appeal to more than material welfare," Coolidge has said. "Wages won't satisfy, be they never so large. Nor houses; nor lands; nor coupons, though they fall thick as the leaves of autumn. Man has a spiritual nature. Touch it, and it must respond as the magnet responds to the pole. To that, not to selfishness, let the laws of the Commonwealth appeal. Recognize the immortal worth and dignity of man. Let the laws of Massachusetts proclaim to her humblest citizen, performing the most menial task, the recognition of his manhood, the recognition that all men are peers, the humblest with the most exalted, the recognition that all work is glorified. Such is the path of equality before the law. Such is the foundation of liberty under the law. Such is the sublime revelation of man's relation to man—Democracy."

The greatest leaders we have had have been spiritual leaders. In Washington, in Lincoln and Roosevelt, in every man who has stirred America, there has been always an appeal that reached down beneath the material to something large, and unselfish, and eternal in men. And Calvin Coolidge, also, is a leader of that sort.







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